

Press Note

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Mid Himalayan Watershed Development Project ushering in prosperity of people

Shimla

Pawan Kumar of Charuri village, having a family of six to support, barely managed to make his both ends meet from his two-hectare land. The family virtually led a life of penury and starvation in its two-room mud dwelling. And the first casualty of his hand-to-mouth existence was his two daughters dropping out of school after Class VIII.

But two years down the line, things and life have changed for Pawan, thanks to the World Bank's Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project coupled with the efforts made the Himachal Pradesh Government. Now, he has a flourishing crop and his earnings from growing vegetables alone in the past six months have aggregated Rs 80,000. His daughters are back in school and the two-room mud dwelling is now a six-room concrete house. The family is making good use of the extra income. There are many such Pawan Kumars in different villages of the State where 90 per cent of the people own land, the average size of their holding being less than half-an-acre.

As the world is struggling to beat back global slow-down, thousands of families all over Himachal Pradesh are sitting pretty looking recession, which has been an annual feature for them until two years ago, right in the face. Village Charuri is symbolic of the undercurrents of change sweeping the state. According to the baseline survey, poverty and accessibility are among the key indices to identify beneficiaries of the World Bank's Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project. The greatest contribution of the project lies in ensuring sustainable management of land and water.

The most effective and enduring intervention of the World Bank project has been raising of watershed structures which helped harness the water that was never tapped. Now, water reaches right up to the tail-end of far-away fields and has changed the way people do the farming. The robust water-end harvesting structures are now owned and managed by the villagers.

With water reaching their fields, they are no longer solely dependent on traditional crops. They are now growing several vegetables in abundance and reaping huge dividends. Resultantly, the income levels of hundreds of poor families have gone up. They are beginning to spend more on households assets, education and livestock. Villagers are getting surplus water for both irrigation and drinking purposes. There is adequate water for Rabi and Kharif crops with hundred per cent cropping intensity as against 0-15 per cent productivity levels until two years ago, and high value.

Another spin-off of the World Bank project has enabled the womenfolk to unleash a silent revolution. Self-help is the new buzzword in villages. "Women's groups have been one of the main driving forces for the project. Now, there are more than 5,000 groups that are actively

managing several of the project's activities," said R. K. Kapoor, Project Director.

Self-groups are helping women undertake several income-generating activities. Shamlal Jharlyl, Pradhan of Charuri village said, for the community, ownership of assets and active participation in their own development seems to be one of the major driving forces in creating livelihood opportunities. The project has covered 20 per cent of the state area. It has established a good natural resource base and livelihood opportunities enabling people to demand better healthcare, better education and better sanitation.

Bhavani Thakur of Chararu alone produced and sold turmeric worth Rs 1,000, onions Rs 6,000 and garlic Rs 2,500. Bini Devi said, "I am earning as much as my husband does, through different income-generating activities. I am earning about Rs 6,000 to Rs 7,000 more a year through several initiatives as plantation, poultry farming, and knitting," said Sushma Devi of Chararu village.

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